Practice Makes Perfect

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Practice Makes Perfect

by Desdemon

Summary

Charlie wants a favor from Knox.

“C’mon, Knox, what’s the problem? Why not?”

Charlie had followed him all the way to his room, arguing loudly the whole way, in plain view of everyone. Knox had kept his head down and pretended he had no idea Charlie was behind him.

Now, he doubled back, past Charlie, forcing himself not to *slam* the door shut, and turned around.

“Because it’s *gay*, Charlie, okay? And I am not a f- a *faggot*.” He whispered suddenly on ‘faggot,’ fearing someone had heard him. “And neither are you,” he added accusatorily, crossing to the window. He closed the shutters. “So what is it, huh? You get paid? Did the guys put you up to this?” He fiddled with the catch on the shutters, and when he had to turn around he found himself reluctant to look Charlie in the eyes, certain he still looked as embarrassed and splotchy as he had in the bathroom. He crossed his arms and studied the bed to his right.

“Jesus, Overstreet, you make it sound like I’m asking you to *marry* me. Nobody put me up to it.” Charlie managed to shove his hands into his pockets and spread them in a “Who, me?” gesture all at the same time. “All I’m saying is, you need the experience, I need the experience -“

“You don’t need the experience,” Knox muttered.

“I do too –“

“You do *not*.”

Charlie continued as if he hadn’t spoken. “Do you know what Molly said to me when she dumped me? Do you know what she said to me?” He pointed at Knox as if Knox were to blame. “She said I was a bad kisser.”

Knox pressed his lips together and raised his eyebrows.

“What? You don’t think that’s a big deal? Knox, that is a big fucking deal. Wars start over of that kind of stuff.”

“Oh, like which ones?”

“Like, you know, the Trojan War.” At Knox’s look he sneered, “Oh, shut up, there was a chick involved, wasn’t there? Look, I’m trying to ask for help here,” he said, taking his hands out of his pockets. “All

right? This is a cry for help. You don't have to be an asshole about it." Knox started to laugh around 'cry for help.' "C'mon, it was hard enough for me to admit somebody thinks I'm a bad kisser."

Still laughing helplessly, Knox started to shake his head, then pressed his hands to his face and emitted a frustrated groan. "Charlie," he said, extending his hands, and all he could do was grin while he said this, "you're the asshole." He shook his open palms at Charlie. "You're the asshole, Charlie, I mean, what the *hell?* Are you serious? Are you really serious?"

"Yes, I'm serious," Charlie protested immediately, looking hurt, before Knox was even finished talking. "I'm really serious. I'm not trying to be an asshole. I'm really asking. I mean, if you think about it, it's in your best interest. I know things," he admitted modestly. "You don't forget what you know – I mean, even if I'm not good at it anymore, I can still teach-"

"I'm going to kill you," Knox said, genially.

"Don't be that way, *Knox*…"

"No, I'm going to kill you." The smile was never genuine to begin with, and it was suffering now, brittle on his face. "How could you embarrass me like that, Charlie?" Knox gestured to the door behind Charlie.

"What, the hallway?" Charlie glanced over his own shoulder, then looked back at Knox knowingly. "Don't worry. I was very subtle."

Knox stared at him. "You were subtle."

Charlie shrugged, clearly pleased with himself. "I tried to be subtle, yes. For your sake," he added.

Knox licked his lips and blinked, trying to wrap his head around any of this. He felt his stomach knot in anger. "So Molly Radcliffe told you you were a bad kisser, and you thought, 'Hey, Knox is easy, Knox'll be a fag with me if I ask him-'"

"Hey, hey, it isn't like that," Charlie said. "First of all, I'm not gay. Second of all, you're not particularly faggy, I just thought -" He shrugged again. "I don't know. You're my best friend. I kinda figured…" For the first time, he looked uncomfortable. "I figured if I asked you, you wouldn't make fun of me."

Knox could not believe he was having this conversation with Charlie Dalton. “Look, I just can’t, Charlie. I can’t. It’s completely wrong, and creepy, and… wrong. Okay?”

Charlie took a deep breath. “Knox, I am not down on bended knee. I am not asking you to run away with me into the sunset, got that? I *am* asking you to help me. I am asking you because I trust you not to broadcast my prowess as a kisser from the rooftops. And I do have prowess,” Charlie apparently felt it necessary to add. “Look, it’s not like I’d tell anybody. The fact that you said yes would not make you a fag. Importantly, the fact that I asked does not make *me* a fag.”

“I haven’t *said* yes, Charlie.”

“What? Oh, right, right.”

“Charlie, *no*,” Knox said, because he saw where this was going. Charlie thought he had Knox, now, for some reason; he thought he’d seen something in Knox’s face that meant a ‘yes’ was on its way. And if Knox didn’t nip this – crazy – whatever-the-hell this was in the bud *right now*, Charlie would consider Knox fair game for the rest of the year. Possibly the rest of their time at Welton. “You asked me, and my answer is no. Okay? Do you understand? N-O. No.” He sliced his arms through the air to emphasize his decision.

Charlie breathed in through his nose, this time. Knox waited for him to relent and leave. “Why not?” Charlie asked finally.

“What?”

“You heard me. Why don’t you want to make out with me?”

“Because I’m not *gay*, Charlie.” It took an effort not to shout. “You’re not gay, I’m not gay, and we shouldn’t be – touching – in any – inappropriate way,” Knox said, flushing as he faltered.

Charlie looked at him soulfully, and covered his heart with his hand. “Your virtue is safe with me. I promise.” Knox may have spluttered, because Charlie grinned lasciviously and said, “It’s nothing to be ashamed of. Hell, I was a virgin once.”

Knox ground his jaw and looked at the wall to the left of Charlie’s head. “Get out of my room.” Nip this in the bud.

“Not until you agree to make out with me, in the *interest* -“ Charlie had to raise his voice over Knox’s objections. “ – the *interest* of *helping*

a friend, and also in the interest of helping you one day losing your cherry to a lovely lady," Charlie added, fluttering his eyelashes at Knox.

"Charlie, please don't try to tell me this is for my own good."

Charlie held up his hands defensively. "I speak nothing but the truth, my friend. I admit, mostly I am concerned that I will never again instill the fire into women that I once did, but there is also the side benefit that a fraction of my incredible font of knowledge may pass down to the underprivileged." Here he gestured at Knox. "It's a win-win situation, I've got to be honest with you."

"That is incredibly generous of you, Charlie."

"Thank you," Charlie said modestly.

"The answer is still no."

Charlie looked like he was about to protest, but then he stopped, and studied Knox. His expression grew sad. He held up his hands. "Fine," he said. "You don't want to help me, that's fine."

"I don't want to help you," Knox confirmed.

"Hey, it's just more evidence, you know?" Charlie asked, and his voice was dull somehow. "That I can't get anyone to like me." He looked down, as if just now - *just now* - realizing that this situation was embarrassing, and then he looked back up at Knox, and gave him a tight smile.

Knox stifled the guilt. "Charlie, that doesn't even make any sense."

Charlie gave a tired sigh. "It doesn't have to make sense, Knox, okay? I get that everything has to make sense in your little world, but I'm not like that." He swiped at his eyes, and Knox thought for one panicked, irrational moment that Charlie was crying.

"Charlie, I didn't –" By now he could see that Charlie wasn't crying, so he took a breath and tried to collect what he was trying to say. "I'm not trying to upset you," Knox said. "To be honest, I can't really imagine how this *would* upset you." He clapped his hands to his chest. "I'm the one who's being reasonable here. *You're* being a complete lunatic." He pointed at Charlie, then ran a hand through his hair. "A complete lunatic," he said, sort of to himself.

“If it were me, I would do it for you,” Charlie said intently. Knox rolled his eyes. “No, I mean it. If you came to me with some weird request, and I didn’t like it, but I knew it would help you – I would do it. You know I would.”

Well, yes, Charlie would. Knox had, in fact, asked him to do some pretty out there stuff in the past, and Charlie was always game, always two hundred percent behind him. But it didn’t matter, because Knox *never* would have asked him to do something this like this. It was a moot point, because it would never happen.

“Please,” Charlie said. “I’m asking you.”

Knox avoided his eyes. “Charlie…”

“Knox.” Knox looked at him. Charlie was looking at him seriously, pleadingly. “Come on.”

Knox pressed his lips together and shook his head, staring at Charlie.

"Please." Charlie stared right back.

Knox swallowed and looked away again. Then he sighed. And then he nodded.

There was a pause. Then Charlie said, “Knox Overstreet, you are a superior human being. I mean it: when people ask me who my idol is, I will give them your name, my friend.” Knox looked up in time to see Charlie cross to the door and lock it, and suddenly Knox was sweating and swallowing with difficulty and he was pretty sure he was blotchy again.

Charlie turned around. “So.” There was a smirk on his face.

Knox’s stomach flipped, and not in a good way. “I swear to God, Charlie, if you try to seduce me I will jump out of this window.”

Charlie held up his hands. “Sorry, sorry, force of habit. Won’t happen again.” Charlie made an ambiguous motion with his hands.

Knox cleared his throat. “What?”

“Come *here*,” Charlie said, and now Knox could see that he was motioning Knox towards him.

“Oh,” Knox said, and he moved away from the window, though not much closer to Charlie. “So…” he said. “What do you… I mean, what

do you want me to…" He flapped his arms uselessly. "Uh."

Charlie stepped a *lot* closer. "All right, so I'm going to kiss you, and then I want you to tell me what I'm doing wrong, or what makes it bad, or whatever. Got it?"

Knox tried to grin. "I don't think that'll…" But Charlie had already swooped in.

His mouth was a little squishy, which Knox noticed immediately. Charlie pulled away only to kiss him again, squishier, and again, kind of sucking in Knox's lower lip. Knox felt a little queasy. Then Charlie got into this rhythm, and Knox was starting to think about homework when Charlie suddenly pulled away.

"That was it?" Knox asked.

"No, that was not it," Charlie said, and his mouth looked a little swollen, a little wetter than usual. Knox wondered if his mouth looked like that, and self-consciously licked his lips. "You've got to be *in*to it, man. You've got to work with me." Charlie started snapping his fingers.

"Charlie," Knox said, and he almost laughed. "I'm not going to be into it. I can't. And I don't think I'm qualified to tell you what you're doing w-"

"Knox, the least I can do is try to teach you something," Charlie said patronizingly. "And I'm telling you, if you just sit there and force some girl to gape at you like a fish, she'll just walk in the other direction. So just, you know, do what I do."

Knox sighed a long-suffering sigh. "Do what you do. Okay." He squared his shoulders. "Do your worst."

"Oh, we'll work up to that," Charlie said, wiggling his eyebrows, and Knox barely had time to roll his eyes before their faces were pressed together again. Charlie put a hand on the back of Knox's neck to keep them connected. Charlie sucked at his lips, and then let Knox attempt to suck on Charlie's. Charlie ran his teeth across Knox's lower lip, surprising Knox with the shock of nerves, and *giggled* when Knox tried it in return. Knox was not flattered. Knox opened his eyes at one point, but the sight of Charlie's face distorted and looming almost made him laugh out loud, so he made himself shut his eyes again.

Then, just when Knox was starting to get into Charlie's rhythm a little

bit, Charlie screwed him up again by sticking his tongue into Knox's mouth. Knox yanked his head back.

"What?" Charlie said, breathless and red-mouthed. "What's the problem?"

Knox wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before answering. "I don't know," he said. "Could you just… not… you know, stick it in there like that?" He could feel his face growing hot just from saying it out loud.

"It's gotta go in at some point, Knox my boy, that's what kissing *is*," Charlie pointed out, spreading his hands.

"Well, okay, just – do it differently," Knox said. "It's gross."

"Fine," Charlie said. He held up a hand and raised his eyebrows as if to say, are you happy now? And then he slid his fingers around Knox's neck again and drew him into Take 3. This time, Charlie sort of lapped his way into Knox's mouth, gaining ground a little bit at a time. Knox felt some satisfaction at having made a positive change to this experience. The tongue thing was still sort of disgusting, and much slimier than Knox had expected, but it was tolerable. Charlie's tongue slid in and out of Knox's mouth before Knox realized he should be trying this, too. He pushed his tongue forward a little, mindful not to shove it in. When Charlie felt his intention, he withdrew his tongue somewhat, giving Knox room to explore. It was basically like sticking out his tongue – into someone else's mouth. He licked at Charlie's tongue, feeling the textured slide of taste buds. A laugh cut itself off in his throat, which got Charlie going, and then they had to separate for fear of choking on each other.

"So? Better, right?" Charlie asked when they were done laughing.

Knox shrugged, figuring his standing comment of 'It's not hot because you're male' was implied. "I guess," he said.

"Good," Charlie said. "That's good. All right. Your turn."

Knox pointed at himself, eyebrows raised, and then pressed his lips – which were feeling sort of worn out – together.

"C'mon. C'mon," Charlie said.

"All right, all right, try not to explode," Knox said.

He stepped forward. Charlie's breath was audible – quiet but erratic, same as Knox's. He mirrored Charlie's earlier move, slipping a hand behind Charlie's neck, thumb at his hairline, shifting his palm a bit for purchase, then gripped Charlie's neck tighter and pulled Charlie to him. By the time Charlie's mouth reached his it was a smile. Knox pulled at his lower lip, then pushed his tongue slickly into Charlie's mouth to make him stop smiling. He tugged at Charlie too hard, and Charlie stumbled into him, hips against his hips, legs faltering around his legs. Charlie laughed into his mouth and compensated by wrapping his fingers around the knot of Knox's tie and dragging them both the other way.

Knox immediately, electrically, became aware of Charlie.

He jerked his head back and gasped, "That. Do that. Do that again." His hand scrabbled at his own throat, covering Charlie's.

"What?" Charlie said at first. "This?" Then his voice changed, somehow, went lower. "This?" Guided by Knox's hand, Charlie tightened Knox's tie, just a little, and pulled. A groan escaped Knox's tightly pressed lips, and he heard - *felt* - Charlie let out a slow breath. Then Charlie fit his mouth into Knox's, and Knox took Charlie's head in both of his hands, fingers digging into his hair, and felt Charlie's hand tightening where it had cradled his head. Charlie pulled steadily on his necktie, and with every sparkling hot shiver that slid down his back, Knox closed his eyes tighter and kissed Charlie harder. In between kisses, Knox could barely hear Charlie murmuring, his voice a rumble against Knox's chest, "This works? Is this okay? Is this working? Is this what you want?" Knox arched his neck away from Charlie, forcing a sharper pressure, and moaned steadily against Charlie's cheek. He hadn't noticed, but Charlie was sort of rubbing himself against Knox now, and that felt good too, it all felt good now, even the kissing, and Knox didn't even care that it was wet or squishy. His hands slid around Charlie's shoulders, his upper arms, and back up to his neck. His thumbs brushed Charlie's cheeks. The slow throb in his neck and face was so simple, but Knox thought he might go nuts from feeling it, feeling Charlie's hand dragging at his throat, feeling Charlie's kisses in an aching mouth.

The next moment, he was pushing Charlie violently away, tugging his tie away from his throat at the same time. He tried to slow his breathing and clear his throat at the same time, and almost choked. "W-who is it?" he called, and winced at the sound of his voice, deep and sort of broken.

“It’s us!” It was Neil. “You coming?”

For a second Knox couldn’t think what he was talking about. He stared at Charlie, who narrowed his eyes in thought, and then they both remembered. Study hall was soon. Maybe now. What time was it?

“Yeah,” Knox called, and he sounded better now, though there was a sudden stabbing guilt in his gut to remind him just exactly what the hell he’d been doing for the last twenty minutes. “Just give me a minute!”

“All right, but if you’re late, we’ll deny all knowledge of your whereabouts,” Neil warned, and Knox could hear the others sniggering in the background.

“Aye aye,” Knox called dryly.

“And if you see Charlie, tell him the same. Plausible deniability, you write that down.”

Knox locked eyes with Charlie. He swallowed. Felt suddenly sick. “Yeah,” he called. He heard the troupe move away from the door.

There was a silence while Charlie fixed his hair and Knox rubbed his throat. He was still thrumming, through and under his skin, and his hand trembled as it massaged the delicate skin. He hoped to God there wasn’t a mark.

“So,” Charlie said after he was done preening. “How was I?” He grinned jauntily at Knox.

Knox looked at the floor and swallowed again. He looked up at Charlie and had to look away again. “You were fine,” he said. “Molly Radcliffe will swoon.”

“Ah,” Charlie scoffed, waving a hand. “Greener pastures, Knox. Molly and I are a thing of the past.” His smile dropped quickly and he was the first to the door. Before he unlocked it he turned and said to Knox, earnestly or sadly or frightened, Knox couldn’t tell, “It’s good to know, though. I mean – thanks.” He offered Knox a closed smile, and then he was out the door. It shut behind him with a clatter.

Knox searched through his drawers for a mirror to check his neck, and when he had made sure that it was acceptable and that no questions would be asked, he gathered up his books and went to study hall. And

if Charlie looked at him a little too long when he came in, and if later Knox had to ask to be excused so that he could run to the bathroom and dry heave into the toilet, well, these were consequences Knox should have seen coming. He never did get any studying done.

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